

## The Perfectionists Club by orphan\_account

**Series:** Derry's Club [1]

**Category:** IT (2017), IT - Stephen King, Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Aged-Up Character(s), Alternate Universe - High School, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Bill has two dads bc yes, F/M, Inspired by Novel, M/M, Murder Mystery, Other Fandoms Not Mentioned in Tags, Other Ships Not Mentioned in Tags, some riverdale cameos bc why not, stan deserves happiness

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Audra Phillips, Barbara "Barb" Holland, Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Henry Bowers, Josie McCoy, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Pennywise (IT), Steve Harrington, The Losers Club (IT), Veronica Lodge, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Ben Hanscom/Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough/Stanley Uris, Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

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**Summary:**

«Be careful what you wish for.»

Everything about the town of Derry seems perfect, from their top-tier highschool to their overachieving residents. But get closer though, and you'll realize that nothing in Derry is as it seems.

Bill, Richie, Beverly, Mike, Ben, Eddie and Stan are seven teenagers who strive to be perfect. They plan the murder of Henry Bowers, the perfectly popular guy who used all seven of them. It was an hypothetical murder of course, just a joke. But when Bowers ends up dead on the exact same way that they planned, they become prime

suspects. But they didn't do it. So who did?

Now it's up to them to find the real killer before their perfect lives come crashing down around them.

# 1. The Party

## Author's Note:

omg I'm about to start the losers club murder fanfic  
no one asked for. Let me know what you think.  
I also posted this on wattpad.  
<https://www.wattpad.com/story/142649121-the-perfectionists-club-reddie-stenbrough-benverly>

In many ways, Derry, Maine, looks like any average suburb: Porch swings creak gently in the evening breeze, the lawns are green and well kept, and all the neighbors know one another. But this little town is anything but average. In Derry, it's not enough to be good; you have to be the *best*.

That's what seven teenagers wanted in the whole world. But perfection comes with a price.  
Little did they know, they were about to pay it.

On Friday night, just as the sun was setting, cars began to pull up to Henry Bowers's huge, faux-Italian villa. The house had wrought iron gates, a circular driveway with a marble fountain, multiple balconies, and a three-tiered, crystal chandelier visible through the front two-story window. All the lights were on, loud bass thumped from inside, a cheer rose up from the backyard. Kids with liquor spirited from their parents' cabinets or bottles of wine shoved into their purses sauntered up to the front steps and walked right inside. No need to ring the bell—Mr. and Mrs. Bowers weren't home.

Too bad. They were missing the biggest party of the year.

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Bill Denbrough-Mills, dressed in his best pair of jeans and a big red sweater with the words "**Derry is the best!**" printed on it, climbed out of an Escalade with his girlfriend, Audra Phillips, and her soccer friends Nancy Wheeler and Barbara Holland. Audra shaded her blue

eyes and gaped at the mansion. "Oh my God, this place is *huge*."

Steve Harrington, who desperately wanted to be Nancy's boyfriend—he was also Bill's biggest soccer rival—stepped out of the backseat and said. "The kid has it all."

"Except a s-soul," Bill muttered, limping up the lawn on his still-sore-from-a-soccer-injury ankle. Silence fell over the group as they stepped inside the grand foyer, with its checkerboard floor and a sweeping double staircase. Audra cast him a sideways glance. "W-What? I was kidding," Bill said with a laugh.

Because if you spoke out against Henry—if you so much as boycotted his party—you'd be off the Derry High A-list. But Henry had as many enemies as friends, and Bill hated him most of all. His heart pounded, thinking about the secret thing he was about to do. He wondered whether the others were there yet.

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"Worst party ever." Said Will Byers, who was hanging out with Ben Hanscom in Will's car. Ben didn't say anything and climbed out of his cousin's car. The truth is, Ben was never in a Henry Bowers's party before. But he couldn't say that to Will, he would think it was strange.

"Are you okay buddy?" Will asked, patting Ben on the shoulder.

"Yeah, I'm just bored." Ben answered, looking at the big mansion in front of him, it looked like those houses in teen dramas Ben desperately wanted to live in. "Let's get this over with, I have a Biology test on Monday."

"Ugh, man," Will rolled his eyes. "You always study, you need to relax some days."

"*Reading* makes me relaxed." It was true, all Ben needed in his life was a pair of books and a quiet place and he would be the happiest boy in the world.

"Just two hours, okay? If I get drunk you can take my car."

Ben nodded, but he knew the truth, he wasn't gonna leave, not yet at

least. Not until the plan was successful.

He spotted Bill Denbrough-Mills and his soccer friends entering Henry's house. He thought of going with him and say hi, but he knew everyone would just make fun of him. *Look, it's the fat kid! He's gonna eat us!*

"Two hours," Ben said to Will. "I think I do need to relax."

Maybe this party was everything Ben needed, until hell broke loose tomorrow.

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The den was filled with candles and fat red cushions. Richie Tozier held court in the middle of the room. He had a beer in his hand and his phone in the other. He was using his usual white T-shirt and black jacket, which made him look irresistible. Or at least that was what girls said.

Michael Wheeler, a junior who'd just dyed his hair the same black shade as Richie's, stopped and gave a reverent smile. "You look great, dude" he gushed, same as the others.

"Thanks," Richie said modestly and took a sip of the bottle.

"Where'd you get those clothes?" Michael asked.

Richie's friend Victor Criss inserted himself between the two. "Why, Michael?" he snapped. "Are you gonna tell your mommy to buy you the exact same clothes?"

Richie laughed as Victor Criss and Belch Huggings, another of Richie's friends, high-fived. Michael set his jaw and stomped away. Richie bit his lip, wondering if he'd been too mean. There was only one person he wanted to be mean to deliberately tonight.

And that was Henry.

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Meanwhile, Beverly Marsh stood with her boyfriend, Dustin Henderson, in the Bowers' reclaimed oak and marble kitchen,

nibbling on a carrot stick. She eyed a tower of cupcakes next to the veggie tray longingly. "Remind me why I decided to do a cleanse again?"

"Because you're *insane*?" Dustin raised his eyebrows mischievously.

Beverly gave him an uh-duh look and pushed her smooth, straight, perfect red hair out of her eyes. She was the type of girl who hated even looking at cross sections of the human body in biology class; she couldn't stand the idea that she was that ugly and messy inside.

Dustin swiped his thumb on the icing and brought his hand toward Beverly's face. "Yummy . . ."

Beverly drew back. "Get that away!" But then she giggled. Dustin had moved here in ninth grade. He wasn't as popular or as rich as some of the other guys, but he always made her laugh. But then the sight of someone in the doorway wiped the smile off her face. Henry Bowers, the party's host, stared at her with an almost territorial grin.

*He deserves what he's going to get*, she thought darkly.

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Mike Hanlon got out of his dad's car and looked around. The last time he was in Henry's house he was twelve years old, it didn't look any different.

"What time do I pick you up?" His dad, John Hanlon, asked.

Mike rolled his eyes. "Don't. My friends are taking me home." But a voice on his mind said '*What friends?*' that made him regret his words.

His dad sighed. "Okay, kiddo. Call me if you have any problems, okay? No drinking." With that, he drove off, leaving Mike to his luck.

Mike sighed and staring walking towards the house, he could already see people making out in the grass. And a few boys puking in a trashcan.

"Mike Hanlon," He heard a voice behind him. Henry Bowers was standing there, with a evil look on his face. Not that it was unusual. "I don't remember inviting *you* to my party."

"I don't think you remember your own name, Henry. I came for the drinks." It was the first time Mike had fired back to Henry. His chest tightened.

Henry laughed. "Aw. Look at you, trying to be rude. I like your shirt, by the way. It's so simple, like *you*."

He entered his house leaving Mike frowning. *Control yourself*, he thought, *in a few hours, Henry wouldn't bother you again*.

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In the backyard—which had high, swooping arcades that connected one patio to another; huge potted plants; and a long slate walkway that practically ended in the water—Eddie Kaspbrak rolled up his jeans and plunked his feet into the infinity-edge pool. A lot of people were swimming, including his best friend, Max Mayfield, and Max's boyfriend, Lucas Sinclair.

"Eddie, get in!" Max said, Lucas was hugging her from behind, making her giggle. "The pool is amazing!"

Eddie shook his head. "I don't have a swimsuit."

Then the patio door opened, and Henry Bowers, the man of the hour, sauntered onto the lawn with a smug, I'm-the-lord-of-this-party look on his face. He strolled to two boys and bumped fists. After a beat, they glanced Eddie's way and started whispering.

Eddie sucked in his stomach, feeling their gazes canvass his snub nose, his oversized cotton sweater. He knew what they were talking about. His hatred for Henry flared up all over again.

*Beep.*

His phone, which sat next to him on the tiled ground, lit up. Eddie glanced at the text from a number he didn't know he still had. Bill Denbrough-Mills.

*It's time.*

Richie, Ben, Mike and Beverly received the same text. Like robots, they all stood, excused themselves, and walked to the rendezvous point. Empty cups lay on the ground in the hall. There was a cupcake

smashed on the kitchen wall, and the den smelled distinctly of pot. The six teenagers convened by the stairs and exchanged long, nervous glances.

Mike cleared his throat. "So."

Beverly pursed her full lips and glanced at her reflection in the enormous mirror. Bill rolled back his shoulders and felt for something in his pocket. It rattled slightly. Eddie checked his own bag to make sure the camera he'd swiped from his mom's desk was still inside.

It had been a long time since they were like this, alone in a room. Not technically, they could still hear people singing and laughing in the background. But right now, it felt like they were alone, the six of them in a top of a cake.

Then Richie's gaze fixed on a figure hovering in the doorway. It was Stan Uris, the seventh and last member of the group. Stan rushed up to the group, pulling the hoodie of his sweater around his face.

All seven of them glanced around to see if anyone was watching. "I can't believe we're doing this," Eddie admitted.

Bill's eyebrows made a V. "You're not b-backing out, are you?"

Eddie shook his head quickly. "Of course not."

"G-Good." Bill glanced at the others. "Are we all still in?"

Stan nodded. Mike just hummed in agreement. After a moment, Richie said yes, too. Ben, who was looking nervous, agreed. And Bev, who was touching up her lip gloss, gave a single, decisive nod.

Their gazes turned to Henry as he wove through the living room. He greeted kids heartily. Slapped friends on the back. Shot a winning smile to a girl who looked like a freshman, and the girl's eyes widened with shock. Whispered something to a different girl, and her face fell just as quickly.

That was the kind of power Henry Bowers had over people. He was the most popular guy at school—handsome, athletic, charming, the head of every committee and club he joined. His family was the



wealthiest, too—you couldn't go a mile without seeing the name Bowers on one of the new developments popping up or turn a page in the newspaper without seeing Henry's state senator mother cutting a ribbon at a new bakery, day care facility, community park, or library. More than that, there was something about him that basically . . . *hypnotized* you. One look, one suggestion, one command, one snarky remark, one blow-off, one public embarrassment, and you were under his thumb for life. Henry controlled Derry, whether you liked it or not. But what's that saying? "*Absolute power corrupts absolutely.*" And for all the people who worshipped Henry, there were those who couldn't stand him, too. Who wanted him . . . gone, in fact.

The seven teenagers looked at one another and smiled. "All right, then," Beverly said, stepping out into the crowd, toward Henry. "Let's do this."

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Like any good party, the bash at the Bowers house lingered into the wee hours of the morning. Leave it to Henry to have an in with the cops, because no one raided the place for booze or even told them to cut the noise. Shortly after midnight, some party pics were posted online: two girls kissing in the powder room; the school's biggest prude doing a body shot off the star running back's chest; one of the stoners grinning sloppily, holding several cupcakes aloft; and the party's host passed out on a Lovesac beanbag upstairs with something Sharpied on his face. Partying hard was Henry's specialty, after all.

Revelers passed out on the outdoor couch, on the hammock that hung between two big birch trees at the back of the property, and in zigzag shapes on the floor. For several hours, the house was still, the cupcake icing slowly hardening, a tipped-over bottle of wine pooling in the sink, a raccoon digging through some of the trash bags that had been left out in the backyard. Not everyone awoke when the boy screamed. Not even when that same someone—a junior named Will Byers—ran down the stairs and screamed what had happened to the 911 dispatcher did all the kids stir.

It was only when the ambulances screeched into the driveway, sirens blaring, lights flashing, walkie-talkies crackling, that all eyes opened. The first thing everyone saw were EMT workers in their reflective jackets busting inside. Will pointed them to the upper floor. There

were boots on the stairs, and then . . . those same EMT people carrying someone back down. Someone who had Sharpie marker on his face. Someone who was limp and gray.

The EMT worker spoke into his radio. "We have an eighteen-year-old male DOA."

*Was that Henry?* everyone would whisper in horror as they staggered out of the house, horrifically hungover. *And . . . DOA? Dead on arrival?*

By Saturday afternoon, the news was everywhere. The Bowers parents returned from their business meeting in Los Angeles that evening to do damage control, but it was too late—the whole town knew that Henry Bowers had dropped dead at his party, probably from too much fun. Darker rumors posited that perhaps he'd *meant* to do it. Derry was notoriously hard on its offspring, after all, and maybe even golden boy Henry Bowers had felt the heat.

When Ben woke up Saturday morning and heard the news, his throat closed. Beverly picked up the phone three times before talking herself down. Eddie stared into space for a long, long time, then burst into hot, quiet tears. Richie, faked his condolences everytime someone named Henry. Mike locked himself in his room all day. And Bill, who'd wanted Henry dead for so long, couldn't help but feel sorry for his family, even though Henry had destroyed his. And Stan? He went to the dock and stared at the water, his head pounded with an oncoming migraine.

They called one another and spoke in heated whispers. They felt terrible, but they were smart kids. Logical kids. Henry Bowers was gone; the dictator of Derry High was no more. That meant no more tears. No more bullying. No more living in fear that he'd expose everyone's awful secrets—somehow, he'd known so many. And anyway, not a single person had seen them go upstairs with Henry that night—they'd made sure of it. No one would ever connect them to him.

The problem, though, was that someone *had* seen. *Someone* knew what they'd done that night, and so much more.

And *someone* was going to make them pay.

## 2. ° Stan °

### *Five days later*

On a sunny Thursday morning, Stan Uris fought his way through the crowded halls of Derry High, a school that boasted the highest average SAT scores in all of Maine. Overhead, a maroon-and-white banner read *CONGRATULATIONS, DERRY HIGH! VOTED BEST SCHOOL IN AMERICA FOR THE FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW BY U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT! GO SWORDFISH!*

*Get over yourselves*, Stan wanted to shout—though he didn't, because that would seem crazy, even for him. He looked around the corridor. A gaggle of girls in their tennis skirts, he recognized them as Nancy Wheeler, Barbara Holland, and Audra Phillips, congregated around a locker mirror, diligently applying lip gloss to their already impeccably made-up faces. A few feet away, a guy in a button-down shirt, handed out flyers for the student government elections, his smile blindingly white. Two girls came out of the auditorium and brushed past Stan, one of them whispered to the other. "*Ew, you just touched the weirdo!*"

*Yes! So what?* He wanted to shout. Everyone was striving for something or clawing their way to the top . . . and for what? A better chance at the perfect scholarship? A better opportunity to score that perfect internship? Perfect, perfect, perfect, brag, brag, brag. Of course, Stan used to be like that. Not long ago, Stan had been driven to be perfect. And he didn't mind. In a town like Derry *everyone* needed to be perfect.

He was happy too, he had six best friends that wouldn't change to the world. They were laughing in every class, going everywhere together. Richie had the idea of calling them 'The Losers Club' and everyone liked it. They were Losers, but they were Losers together.

But then *It* happened, and the Stan who rose from the ashes a year ago wore the same hoodie every day to go unnoticed. The Losers Club was gone. He hadn't looked at Facebook in months, couldn't imagine dating, had no interest in clubs. Not a single soul glanced at him as he stomped down the hall. If he did get a look, it was one of

apprehension and caution. *Don't talk to him. He's damaged. He's what could happen if you aren't perfect.*

He was about to walk into the film studies classroom when someone caught his arm. "Stanley. Man, did you forget?"

Stan stared at Richie Tozier, who stood behind him. Richie looked perfectly polished in a red t-shirt and leather jacket, his black hair gleaming and his eyes behind his glasses were round with worry. After The Losers Club split up, Richie was the only one who *talked* to Stan. The other five went their own way, but Richie stayed. Stan couldn't be more grateful

"Forget what?" Stan grumbled, pulling his hoodie tighter over his face.

"The assembly today. It's mandatory."

Stan stared at his friend. Like he cared about mandatory *anything*.

"Come on." Richie led him down the hall, and Stan reluctantly followed. "So where have you been, anyway?" Richie whispered. "I've been texting you for two days. Were you sick?"

Stan scoffed. "Sick of life." He'd bagged class for most of this week. He simply hadn't felt like going. What he'd done with his time, he couldn't quite recall—his short-term memory was a tricky thing these days. "It's contagious, so you might want to keep your distance."

"Hey! That's my phrase." Richie laughed, or at least tried to. It sounded like a whale giving birth. And Stan didn't even know how that sounded.

They swept down the hall, passing by Randy, the hippie janitor, who was working his hardest to keep the school squeaky-clean at all times. The auditorium was ahead, and Richie pushed open the heavy wooden door. The large room was filled with kids, yet it felt eerily quiet. A lot of people were sniffing. More shook their heads. A knot of girls hugged. As soon as Stan saw the big picture of Henry on the stage, his blood pressure dropped. The letters RIP were spelled out in flowers beneath his photo.

He looked at Richie, feeling tricked. He'd hoped the Henry memorial had already happened on one of the days he'd ditched. "I'm outta here," he whispered, backing up.

Richie grabbed his arm. "Please," he insisted. "If you don't stay . . . well, you know. It might look strange."

Stan bit his lip. It was true. After what happened at Henry's party, they couldn't afford to call attention to themselves.

He gazed out into the seats. Eddie Kaspbrak and Bill Denbrough-Mills sat a few rows ahead. Beverly Marsh was on the other side of the aisle, sitting stiffly next to her boyfriend. Mike Hanlon was alone in a corner. Ben Hanscom was nowhere to be found. They looked over and exchanged looks with Richie and Stan. Although they were all trying to hold it together, everyone looked spooked. It was strange. Stan had barely remembered them, yet he felt connected to them for life.

*How would you do it? If you were going to kill him, I mean?*

Stan flinched. Beverly's words from that day in film studies floated up so naturally in his mind that it was as if Beverly were right beside him, whispering in his ear. He looked at the stage again. Mr. Obata, the principal, was flipping through some slides for the presentation he was about to give. Some were pictures of Henry through the years—winning the lacrosse state championship, being crowned homecoming king, holding court in the cafeteria. Richie was even in a few of them, from back when he and Henry had been friends. Other slides were generic images of prescription pills. So this was also going to have an antidrug message, since all the rumors said he'd accidentally overdosed on OxyContin, his drug of choice.

And then came the kicker: the image of Henry that Eddie had posted online shortly after the party, the one with the writing on his face. The picture was mostly blurred out, but the comments below—a long paragraph telling the world how horrible Henry was—were not. So it was going to be a bullying assembly, too.

Irony of ironies, considering Henry had been the biggest bully of all.

Stan still remember *that night*. That awful April 4th night, when the sky was crying and Stan was walking towards his house, humming a song he heard in the radio that day. Free of worries. Until he saw Henry and his minions, waiting for Stan. A diabolical smile in Henry's face. *Let's destroy that Jew boy*. Henry had said. After that, everything was blurry to Stan.

*He deserves it*, Stan remembered saying mere days ago. *Everyone hates him. They're all just too scared to admit it. We'd be heroes.*

All at once, the world swirled unsteadily. A white-hot spike of pain shot through Stan's forehead, streaking like lightning across his vision. When he tried to move, his muscles cramped. His eyes fluttered shut.

Richie nudged him forward. "Come on," he whispered. "We have to sit down. We have to act *normal*."

Another wave of pain hit Stan's head. His knees buckled. He'd gotten enough migraines after his *accident* that he knew this was the start of another. But he couldn't have it here. Not in the auditorium in front of all these people.

A weak groan emerged from his lips. Through blurred vision, he could just make out the sudden concern in Richie's face. "Oh my god," Richie said, immediately seeming to recognize what was going on. "I didn't realize. Come on."

Richie pulled him up and led him out of the auditorium and to the box office alcove above. The air smelled like lemon cleaner, and dust motes swirled in the air. Posters for upcoming events papered the ticketing window—a flyer for *Guys and Dolls*, another for the upcoming Honors Orchestra Fall Concert. There was even an old playbill with Stan on it, from when he played in *Romeo & Juliet* with Audra Phillips sophomore year.

Richie sat Stan down. "Breathe," he said softly. "It's a bad one, isn't it?"

"I'm fine," Stan managed to say, his fists clenched in his curly auburn hair. He blinked a few times, his vision clearing. The pain subsided to

a dull ache, but his mind felt scattered.

"Are you sure?" Richie asked, kneeling next to him. "Do you want me to get the nurse?"

Stan stared at his friend. Richie wasn't usually like this, so *caring*. When The Losers Club were together, he was the comedy relief. The one who made the dirty jokes and spit on Eddie's drink just to annoy him. But time happened. Richie had changed. *Almost*.

"No," Stan croaked. He took a shuddering breath. "I'm okay. It's just a headache."

Richie set his jaw, reached into his backpack, and pulled out the bottle of aspirin he carried around for just this occasion. He handed two pills to Stan, and Stan swallowed them dry, feeling the rough tablets grate against the sides of his throat.

Richie waited until Stan had choked down the pills, then breathed in. "Have you thought more about . . . talking to a therapist?"

Stan recoiled. "Not this again."

"I'm serious," Richie's eyes were pleading. "Stan, your headaches are getting worse, and the stress doesn't help. And with this Henry thing . . . well, I'm just worried about you."

"No therapist." Stan crossed his arms over his chest. He pictured baring his soul to a complete stranger while he stared at him and asked, "*Well, how do you feel about that?*"

"I spoke to someone recently . . . about my mom." Richie lowered his eyes.

Stan whipped his head up. "What? When?"

"Last week. I was going to mention it, but then everything happened, and . . ." He trailed off.

Stan held his friend's gaze. Richie looked so hopeful. Stan knew this was hard to Richie. He was the only thing Stan had left.

"Fine," Stan grumbled. "But don't be upset if I bail after ten minutes."



"Deal." Richie's shoulders visibly relaxed. He gave Stan an earnest, grateful smile. "I think she can help you, and besides...if she doesn't you can always..." Richie made a gesture with his hand and Stan immediately recognized it as a sex sign.

"Beep beep, Richie." He whispered, but it was so softly that Richie didn't hear it. *Thank God.* They weren't fourteen anymore.

Stan stood up, nodded good-bye to Richie, and headed for the exit door. He suddenly, desperately, needed a cigarette.

### 3. • Ben •

*“The division of the cells are proportionally equal to the collision of...”*

“God dammit.” Ben Hanscom said to himself. He just couldn't concentrate. He was in a cubicle of the boy's bathroom. Sitting in the toilet, with a three- hundred-pages book on his lap.

The bathroom smelled like sweat and excess of lemon soap, but Ben already got used to it.

He'd never studied ten minutes before a test, but Mrs. Holly, the Biology teacher, was really a pain in the ass. With three Biology tests in a week, Ben was exhausted. Everything in his mind was cells, organs and parts of the body he just wished he'd forget.

But this was *definitely* better than being in the auditorium with everyone else. When he got inside and saw Henry smiling, almost smiling *at* him. Like saying. *Come, little Ben. I'm happy, you're not. And you never will be.* He just ran away and locked himself in the bathroom, hoping to forget *everything*.

He heard the second ring of the day, which meant the assembly was over. He could already hear the footsteps, it sounded like everyone was in a race.

His phone ringed. It was his cousin, Will.

***Where are u??? Why weren't you at the assembly????***

Ben sighed. After Henry's party, he tried talking to Will, he was the one who found Henry after all. But Will kept pushing it away, Ben couldn't blame him, though. It was a traumatic experience for everyone.

But Will was acting as if never happened. That was Derry, if you ask something important, you don't get straight answers. Everyone is smarter than that.

He put his book inside his blue backpack and exited the cubicle. He found Victor Criss and Belch Huggings using the sink. They both

stared at him.

Ben exited the room as fast as he could, but he could hear the laughing of both of them. Ben wasn't a fat kid anymore, but he couldn't erase the past. All the laughs and mocks and tortures, they were something Ben could never forget.

A memory of Henry hit him. Just when he was getting woozy that night at his party, he'd looked at Ben, *really* looked at Ben. And all he'd said was, *Are you gonna eat me, fat boy?*

Ben forced his eyes back open. *No*, he told himself. He would not fall down that hole. He would not relive last week. He would move forward and forget *everything*.

"Whoa, hey there."

Ben didn't realize he collided with someone until he heard their voice. He looked up. His film studies teacher, Mr. Gray, was staring at him, a bottle of coffee in one hand. Gray was one of those cool, good-looking, young teachers who always knew about current music, looked the other way when kids texted in class, and talked about his semester abroad in Paris, when he'd drunk absinthe and made out with a burlesque dancer. He'd started a photography club, where kids developed black-and-white photos the old-fashioned way, and nearly the entire female student population had signed up.

"Mr. Gray. Good morning." Ben wanted to be polite. But anger was prickling his skin. Gray had been the one who made them watch that damned film. He'd been the one to sort them into groups after. Though it had been Ben who asked Gray, *begged him*, to put all of the Losers Club in the same group. But Gray had been the one to ask, *Is murder justified so long as the person really, truly deserved it?*

"Don't get so stressed, it's bad for the mind," Gray said softly, lighting up.

Ben nodded. "Of course, thank you, Mr. Gray." He was about to start walking but Gray touched his shoulder.

"I've read that assignment you gave me. About the justified murder. It

was so lyrical and so *genuine*. You've got talent, Hanscom.”

Ben could feel himself sweating, and his hands trembling. “Um, thanks...I actually have to get to class—”

“Of course, I won't bother you anymore.”

Ben never heard the end of that sentence because he was already running through the stairs to get to the Biology classroom. He wanted to act normal, but he probably looked like an idiot.

*Why can't you be a decent liar?* He shouted to himself.

“Hey, Ben.” Ben heard a voice behind him, when he turned around, he could assure his face was a fresh tomato. Beverly Marsh was standing there, holding hands with her boyfriend Dustin...something. Ben never learned his last name but didn't really *care*.

“Hey, Bev—*erly*” He corrected himself, he almost used the nickname the others used on her.

“Hi, Ben.” Dustin said, raising a hand to bump fists with Ben.

An awkward silence fall into the three of them. Beverly was looking at Ben. Her eyes saying. *Shut up, don't say anything.*

“You've got Biology class?” Beverly asked, her tone of voice casual, but with a little worry.

“Uh, yeah, I actually have a test, so...” He gestured with his hand at the door.

“Yeah, sure, buddy,” Dustin said, putting his arm around Beverly, which made Ben's blood boil. “See you around, okay?”

“Yeah...Bye.” He said, before listening to what Beverly replied. He couldn't even hold a conversation with her. Not right now.

He seated in the first seat he saw, which was the closest one to the teacher's desk. He felt a stabbing migraine coming on. He remembered everything that happened in the past week. *I would use poison to kill him*, Ben had said in that film class, *it's easier that way*.

*Stop it, Ben thought. Forget it ever happened.*

Ben kept repeating that same sentence over and over again. If he believed it, maybe, just maybe, it would become true.

But he couldn't ignore the tiny voice inside his head. *You know what you did*, the voice said. *And when everyone finds out, you'll have no one left.*

#### 4. ~ Beverly ~

Beverly Marsh slid into her desk, in the film studies classroom just as the bell rang for fourth period on Thursday. She was usually fashionably late to class, but she'd had so much on her mind this week that it was worse than usual.

"Cutting it close, Miss Marsh," said Mr. Gray, but she could tell he was mostly teasing. Mr. Gray was one of the youngest teachers in school, just a year or so out of college. He couldn't even pretend to have an authoritarian air when his students were only five years younger than him.

Beverly turned her thousand-watt smile on her teacher. "Sorry, Mr. Gray. Vending machine emergency. Sour Patch Kids are back in stock, everyone!"

A ripple of laughter cut through the classroom. Her boyfriend, Dustin, craned around from the seat in front of her and winked. A different teacher might have gotten mad, but that was what Bev liked about Mr. Gray—and why she knew she could get away with this stuff. He just gave her a dry smile.

"Well, now that our candy-shortage crisis has ended, we can focus on what we're here to do." Mr. Gray picked up a piece of chalk and started to write in sloppy handwriting across the chalkboard: MORALITY AND ETHICS IN CRIME FILM. "We're starting a new unit today."

Beverly flipped her notebook to a blank page and poised her pen to take notes, ready to think about something other than Henry. His picture was plastered every two feet in the hallways, and she'd barely made it through the assembly yesterday.

Advanced film studies was her favorite class—she'd originally signed up because it sounded like an easy A, a chance to watch movies all semester, but she'd ended up really getting into the classic films they watched. So far, they'd talked about representations of women in early monster movies, the way World War II-era Bugs Bunny cartoons had been used as American propaganda, and identity and

trauma in psychological thrillers. There was so much to learn. Under the glitzy, glamorous surface of the simplest popcorn flick, there were often hidden depths of meaning.

Beverly hadn't always taken school seriously. Her freshman year, she'd thought studying was for losers. Of course, she *was* one, a long time ago. After The Losers Club broke apart, she didn't have anywhere to go. She met Nancy Wheeler and Gretta Bowie and her world changed, she used fashioned clothes everyday, took good care of her now long red hair. And putting more makeup than usual. She became a totally different person over night, and all of her memories with those six boys were already buried deep in the sea of her mind.

Then her mom had died, hit by a drunk driver one night on her way home from campus. Her mom had always insisted that Bev was smarter than her report cards. Every time Bev brought home another mediocre test score, Beverly's mom defended her to her dad: "She's figuring out who she is, Alvin. She obviously has a great role model for how to be brilliant"—she pointed to herself ironically—"but no one around here can show her how to be brilliant and beautiful at the same time. That's a burden only she can bear." Beverly's dad would laugh, and the storm would pass.

In the void after her mom's death, Beverly had found herself *wanting* to study for the first time. And it turned out her mom was right—she was smart. Her dad noticed the change in her behavior and her GPA, and constantly told her how proud he was. Teachers began to take her seriously.

That is, until Henry Bowers sent all her hard-won efforts crumbling to sand.

"The crime genre is one that's changed shape dozens of times over the years, always morphing to provide a commentary on the moral stance Americans take at any given point in time." Mr. Gray's voice pulled Beverly back to the present. "A lot of crime movies investigate the idea of a gray area of morality, where heroes would be challenged to behave as criminals—and vice versa. Some people love this about crime film, and some people hate it."

Beverly glanced down at her notes. She'd written the words *heroes*,

*criminals*, and *hate*. She realized with a sinking feeling that the hate she'd written looked far too similar to the hate she wrote on Henry's face last weekend, the one that was featured in newspapers and newscasts and nationwide blogs. She quickly flipped to a new page before anyone could notice.

"Now, before we keep going, I'll hand back your papers on *And Then There Were None*."

Everyone in class sat up, on alert, as most kids did when a teacher was handing back a paper or a test. Beverly knew that in the next few moments, there would be huge smiles . . . and some tears, too. Yes, even a class like film studies mattered. *Every* grade mattered at Derry.

"Some of you did very well," Mr. Gray murmured, peeling a paper off the stack. Bev was sure Mr. Gray looked right at her as he said that, and she sat up a little straighter in her chair. "Some of you, however, need to be challenged. The moral questions this movie asks are complicated and maybe even a little subversive. I'd like to see you really push your arguments on this next unit." Mr. Gray picked up a stack of papers from his desk and started to move around the room.

When he got to her row, Mr. Gray set her paper facedown on the desk. Beverly turned it over, eager to see his notes—and gasped at the bright red C scrawled across the top.

A C? She couldn't believe it. She put lots of effort into this class, watching long-winded interviews with directors and reading film theory articles online. Her papers on the first movies they'd watched, *Psycho* and *Vertigo*, had earned her A-pluses. Then again, she'd written the *And Then There Were None* paper after that eerie group discussion in class—and after she'd lured Henry upstairs at his party. She remembered the heaviness of his body as he leaned on her, the smell of beer on his breath as he tried to kiss her sloppily. The moment his muscles had gone lax . . .

She shook her head. The last thing she had wanted to do was think was about Henry, the movie, or what she'd done.

"How'd you do?"



She glanced up to see Dustin, his arm resting on the back of his seat. His expression changed quickly when he saw that she was upset.

“Um, not so great,” she mumbled.

“It’s okay. Maybe he’ll let you rewrite it. We can watch the movie again together—”

“No,” Beverly said quickly, then winced at the flash of hurt in his warm brown eyes. She just didn’t want to see that movie again, no matter what. “Sorry, I just—”

“Miss Marsh, if you don’t mind, we have more material to cover.” Mr. Gray was watching them both with a frown. Dustin quickly turned back to face front.

Beverly barely heard the rest of the lecture. She turned through the pages of her essay, staring at the red ink in the margins. *What point are you trying to make?* Mr. Gray had written next to one paragraph. *This argument doesn’t hold up* was scribbled next to another. She felt crushed. It had been so, so long since she’d gotten a C. The grade almost made her feel dirty, and she stuffed the paper into her Hervé Chapelier tote bag, not wanting to look at it anymore.

Finally, the bell rang for lunch. “We’ll be assigning new groups for this next unit,” Mr. Gray called out over the buzz of people standing up and starting to pack their bags. “Get ready for a new project next week.”

Thank god, Beverly thought, looking up to see her relief mirrored on the faces of the ex group members of the Losers Club. Richie took a heavy breath. Eddie drummed his fingers against the desk. Ben looked like he was going to pass away of the relief. Beverly looked away. She didn’t have anything against any of those boys. She just wanted to put that whole project—and what it had led to—behind her. She knew it was unfair, but if it hadn’t been for those boys and that one conversation, everything would be different. She wouldn’t have gotten a C. She wouldn’t be racked by guilt.

And Henry, maybe, wouldn’t be dead.

## 5. = Mike =

Thursday afternoon, Mike Hanlon arrived home, and the first thing he did was lock the front and back door immediately, his heart thumping in his chest. When he was about to close the curtains he stopped. He didn't need to lock himself, Henry was gone. All the harassment was sleeping away. Like the sand in a windy day on the beach.

"Mike!" His dad, Fred Hanlon, was spread on the blue couch watching a cook show on the plain TV. "What's wrong?"

Mike sighed, his heartbeats slowing down. "Nothing, I just...It's a habit, I guess."

"There's lasagna in the fridge, your mom got to go to work early today." Fred was holding a plate with butter popcorn and the TV remote in the other.

Mike took a look around, packed boxes were still on the corners, with clothes, gifts and even food. He just came back from Madrid, Spain three weeks ago, but he still felt like an outsider.

A new start had been just what he needed at the time, so he was happy when his dad made the announcement that his family was moving. It was the fall after Stan's accident, and the Losers Club had grown far apart, leaving him with no real friends, just a school full of people he'd known forever.

Before he left for Europe, Mike would sometimes see girls look at him from afar, intrigued, but then look away.

Mike knew he was attractive. People were always saying so, but why didn't he have a date to the seventh-grade spring social, then? One of the last times he and Richie had hung out—one of the awkward get-togethers that summer after Stan's accident—Richie told Mike he'd probably get a lot of dates if he just tried to fit in a little bit more.

But Mike didn't know how to fit in. His parents had drilled it into his head that he was an individual, not a follower of the herd, and should be himself.

Trouble was, Mike wasn't sure who Mike was.

"I'm not really hungry," Mike said. "I was just going to my bedroom to do a History project."

"Don't stay up too late, I'm gonna hear the keyboard."

"Sure, dad." Mike headed to his room, which was next to the main bathroom. The walls were a mix of white and green, with a big bed in the middle of the room, posters of TV shows and movies Mike loved. And a little red wood desk with his laptop on it.

He threw his backpack to his bed and immediately went to his laptop. His fingers trembling, when he typed. *Henry Bowers' death.*

He didn't know what he expected, maybe some interviews with Henry's parents, a forum dedicated to Henry and how young and hot he was to leave this world.

But when he saw the post Jane had just written on the chat feature of Case Not Closed, a crime-solving forum Mike was a little bit addicted to, those small aggravations fell away. His gaze tunneled in on the words on the screen.

**J1011:** *Do you think Henry was murdered?*

Below was a screen grab of a post written just hours before by someone called AP0607. Mike's stomach flipped at the name in the thread's title: *Suicide? Accident? Or planned murder?*

*Yeah, Jane,* Mike thought. *I think I know exactly what happened.* But he couldn't tell Jane that. He wiggled his fingers over the keyboard.

**TheHanlon:** *Maybe, but I think Henry just mistook Oxy with a little candy.*

**JI011:** *You're probably right,*

*have I ever told you I'm addicted to this site?*

**TheHanlon :** *Yeah, you have. Me too.*

It was easy to lose hours on the message boards of CNC. He'd bring his laptop to class, pretending to take notes, but instead weighing in on cold-case murders and abductions. Some days, he skipped class altogether – the course videos went online later anyway. He didn't want to miss any new developments on his cases. Some of the posters were morons or rubberneckers, but others had smart input and practical knowledge: *MizMaizie* used to work for the Seattle PD. *UnicornHorn* had a background in forensics. *CherryBombshell* always chimed in with a one-sentence proclamation like *Spoiler alert: the mom did it*. She was often right.

It was like Mike had his own little CSI unit inside his computer.

And then there was his friend Jane – or JI011, or Jane Ives from Connecticut. On Facebook, Jane was a smiley cheerleader type with perfect skin, short brown hair and perfect teeth. When they'd graduated to WhatsApp, they talked about silly, personal things and made up a game where they compared people they knew to types of candy. Mike had admitted lots to Jane, but not everything. He never told anyone *everything* if he didn't have to.

*JI011: Crazy idea. I'm on spring break starting tomorrow, and I'm going to be super bored. I could come see you. We could check out the Henry stuff together.*

Mike inhaled. It would be amazing to finally meet her in person, but there was this tiny feeling of fear. He ignored it.

**TheHanlon:** *That would be great, you can stay with me. My parents won't mind.*

When Mike saw a Henry report on the news, he dropped everything to watch. He read every Henry investigative story over and over. He scrolled through his memorial page, inadvertently memorizing his friends' names. Trying to find out if someone knew *anything*.

Anything that could connect Mike to Henry. But there was nothing, just a bunch of theories. An unresolved mystery in the quiet town of Derry.

Mike's computer pinged again. He clicked the message.

**J1011:** *Cool! I've been saving money for the bus. I know, I sound lame.*

**TheHanlon :** *Trust me, I'm lamer.*

**J1011 :** *I guess we'll see ;-) I have to go, my little sister wants to play dolls with me hahaha bye!*

Excitement flooded his body, it was happening, he was gonna meet Jane for the first time. He couldn't help but feel galvanized by the challenge. He knew more about this case than most of the cops who'd worked it. Jane *needed* him. Hell, The Losers Club needed him, more than he needed them. Mike could picture Jane logging on to Case Not Closed just like he did, desperate for answers. Maybe if Mike figured it out, everything else in his life that was spinning out of control would fall into place, too. All right, then: He was going to figure out what happened.

It wouldn't solve all his problems. It wouldn't solve all his mysteries.  
But it was a start.